

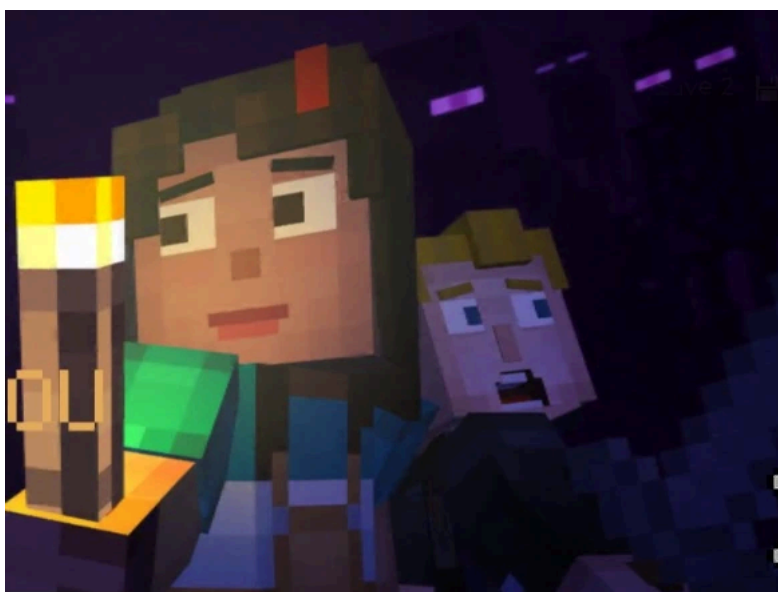


rewrite

By IzzyQueen12

Book 3: The Last Place You Look (Part I)

Now trapped inside Soren's fortress and separated from Ellegaard and Magnus, our team has to find a new way to find the last, most secretive member of the Order of the Stone. They must face many challenges; going deeper inside the fortress, venture to an unknown world and acknowledge past issues.



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Previously on Minecraft: Story Mode Rewrite..

It is said that within every loss, every challenge.. and every failure.. There is a gift.

When revered heroes are lost.. we find new ones in our friends. When faced with a mind-bending problem, we find a way to rise to the occasion. Or when we're given grief, we find a way to give it back..

And when our band of unlikely adventurers are tasked with saving the world from the coming storm, they will bring together the bravest and the brightest to stop it.

But finding the last and most elusive member of the Order of the Stone and his legendary Formidi-Bomb.. would prove their most perilous mission yet.

For some rather our heroes' stories end here.. shutting the door on their adventure forever.

But, like all doors, when one closes, another is bound to open..

◦●●◉❀ Chapter 1: Stuck.. again! ❀◉●●◦

"Noooooooo!"

"Stop. Him!"

"Hurry!"

"You'll. Pay. For. This!" Jesse vowed as he heard the slow cries of his friends behind him but there was nothing they could do to help speed up until the door slammed shut, leaving everyone trapped inside. As they ran, Axel suddenly tripped and fell through the air toward Jesse.

"Watch. It!" Lukas warned. "Get— Out of the way!" He gasped, suddenly turning back to normal speed mid-sentence. Axel fell spat on his face, groaning as pain erupted all over his face.

"Everyone okay?" Jesse asked, checking to see if everyone wasn't too hurt.

"I felt all of that," Axel moaned.

"That was one heck of a landing, Axel," Olivia commented.

"He mostly used his face," Lukas replied.

"We need to find Soren," Jesse said, glancing at the now-shut wall.

"Well, no shit," Maggie said. "How the hell do we get out of here?" She gazed at her friend.

"Chris, can you guess how Ivor closed the door?"

Chris thought for a moment before shaking his head. "No. I have no idea what he did to make the door close," he answered. "No switch, no lever.. it's almost impossible."

"Right? I can't figure out how Ivor made the door close either," Olivia agreed.

"Maybe we should focus more on how it opens?" Lukas suggested.

"That's basically what I said."

"Look, whatever it is, we have to find a way to get out of here - fast. Or who knows what might happen," Jess said, trying to wipe some blood away from her arm but only winced in pain as she tried. Lukas froze when he noticed the blood, his ocean-blue eyes widened in shock and concern.



He went up to her, grabbing her attention. "Jess-? What happened?" He asked slowly.

"I... fell when Ivor hit me with his sword," Jess nervously replied. "But I'll be fine, I promise."

Lukas frowned, not seemingly believing her at all. "Here, let me help you," he said, slowly holding out her arm to treat it. Jess winced slightly from this touch, allowing the blonde to examine the wound. "It looks pretty bad. I think the best thing we could do is patch it up."

"We'll handle it," Jesse frowned, holding his sister's wrist. It was clear he didn't want Lukas anywhere near his sister, but Lukas ignored him. He wasn't going to let Jess go around with an injured arm, especially with all that she's done for him.

"Sure. But how exactly?" Nikki asked as she trotted towards them.

"I found some bandages when we were looking through a closet we found in the hallway in the route Magnus took before Reuben and Zephyr came and told us that you were in trouble," he explained. "I think it just might be enough."

The sisters glanced at Jesse, who was glaring daggers at Lukas. He didn't want to let Lukas step foot near his sister, but at the same time, he couldn't let Jess walk around injured and bleeding. She could bleed to death and with all the pressure on them, he didn't want to add more spark to the flame so he gave in.

"Fine. But make it quick," he scowled. When Lukas sighed in relief, he huffed as he crossed his arms. "Don't be so relieved yet. I still don't trust you."

"Jesse, give it some rest," Nikki scowled, starting to find her brother's attempts to exclude Lukas annoying.

Jess frowned at her brother's actions but she didn't protest because she wanted to avoid starting up another argument. Sitting down, she extended her arm outwards to allow the blonde to patch her up. She was nervous. It's not like she hadn't touched a boy before besides her brothers, but considering the beef her brother has with Lukas, she didn't want to accidentally increase the tension between them. They were dealing with too much already. She was just hoping that they would make up and get along with the mission.

As Lukas patched her up, the two locked eyes for a moment before awkwardly turning away, Jess, now starting to feel a warm feeling in her chest. She felt.. confused? She's never experienced anything like it before and since she wasn't familiar with it, she didn't have a clue about what it was or what it could mean. She was so focused on it that she didn't even realize Lukas was calling her name.

"Huh..?" She said.

"Jess-? Are you okay?" Lukas asked, concerned. "I just said I'm finished."

"Huh-? Oh, I'm sorry. I must've been dozing off," Jess said sheepishly before grinning slightly. "Thanks, Lukas. I... really mean it."

The blonde blushed, scratching the back of his neck nervously. Before he could respond, however, Jesse suddenly grabbed Jess' wrist. "She's fine now. Save the flirting for later," he huffed before trotting away and dragging his sister along.



"Hey! I was just talking to him," Jess scowled before shoving her brother away and crossing her arms. "Jesse, stop. I thought you learned your lesson about starting arguments and shit."

"Jess, you have no idea what Lukas and I have been through together when we were younger," Jesse frowned. "He may seem like Prince Charming or whatever bullshit but.. you wouldn't understand."

"What wouldn't I understand?!"

"Jess I-."

"Can you guys stop?" Nikki said, gaining their attention. She had her arms crossed and looked as though she was going to cry. "It's getting frustrating. Don't we have bigger things to worry about besides.. this?"

Jesse and Jess didn't answer, both feeling remorseful about how all this time, they haven't done anything but bicker. They were annoyed at Magnus' and Ellegaard's constant bickering yet they were doing exactly what they have been doing. Jesse was reminded of Magnus pointing out how there was some unrest in the team and now he couldn't help but admit he was right. He didn't even consider how this would affect Nikki, especially since he knows that Nikki HATES drama.

His thoughts were interrupted by a soft cough nearly and the siblings turned to see Petra distancing herself from the rest of the team as she rubbed her infected arm to try and ease the pain. She looked way worse than before and she feared she wouldn't be able to keep up with the rest of the team. The siblings were the only ones she's told. Well, she wanted to only tell Jesse because she trusted him the most but since Jess and Nikki wouldn't leave his side, they were let in about the dark truth.

Of course, she trusted Jess and Nikki as well but she feared one of them would end up telling someone even though she tried to tell herself that they knew better and they would keep their mouths shut. At least.. until she builds up the courage to tell the rest of the team about her sickness.

"Are you okay..?" Jesse asked slowly as he and his sisters slowly approached the redhead.

"Why.. are you asking me that?" Petra asked, turning the question on him.

"Totally because we're going to sit here and watch you die," Jess replied sarcastically. "Obviously just checking up on you. Don't you see we're worried about you?"

"Everything's fine! All of it," Petra lied although she knew deep down it hurt her trying to. "Are you o-." She was interrupted by a cough. "Wait.. are you-." She was interrupted by a second cough. "Are, you-.."

Jesse gently patted her back, trying to help her breathe in and out correctly. The redhead felt embarrassed, wishing she could do more to try and assure her friends that she was fine. Her coughing fit caught the attention of Lukas, who had joined Axel, Olivia, Chris, and Maggie to come up with a plan to open the door but noticing how poor the redhead looked, he looked skeptical, wondering what the four were discussing.

"Look at this," Petra sighed, rolling up her sleeve and revealing her infected arm once more. The purple mark had enlarged, making the skin around it grayer and it even started to venture

toward her face. "I'm not trying to freak you out.. but I'm a little bit freaked out right now. It's starting to feel stiff."

The siblings were freaked out by how worse her condition was already getting and Nikki even cringed just from seeing it. Without thinking, Jesse suddenly grabbed her hand, gazing straight into her eyes as he moved her auburn strands from her face. Normally, he wouldn't even attempt to do something like this but he didn't care. He just wanted to make sure she was okay.

"You're going to be fine," he promised.

Petra's heart fluttered from his actions but the pain was too much to bear. "It's really painful.." she admitted.

"It'll pass.."

"Let's hope so.."

"C'mon, Petra! This is going too far," Nikki reasoned. "We have to tell the others."

"This isn't a 'we' thing," the redhead huffed.

"Of course, it's a 'we' thing!" Jess corrected. "We're a team. Hello? Birds of a feather flock together?"

"She's right. We're supposed to look out for each other, Petra," Nikki added. "We have to tell the others. They deserve to know."

"Look, I'll tell them. Eventually."

"You have to," Jesse corrected.

"If it becomes more of a thing, I'll tell everyone," Petra said. "But.. let me do it."

The sisters shared worried glances. They both had the same thoughts. Was Petra going to keep to her word or was she just simply saying that so they won't expose the truth? They are aware Petra is a secretive person but they knew someone was going to find out. Jess even wondered if she should tell someone. But who..?

Lukas had been staring at them their entire conversation. At first, he was skeptical, but now he was getting suspicious. What were they talking about? And why were they hiding it from the others? As soon as Nikki turned around, he quickly turned away. He didn't want to be caught staring at them and trying to eavesdrop. Especially by Jesse.

"Hey, guys! I have an idea!" Axel said, grinning contentedly. Since they had nothing better to do, they gathered around him to hear about this idea of his.

"Okay?" Lukas said, curious to what Axel had in mind. As soon as all eyes were on him, Axel faced the closed door and cupped his hands around his mouth.

"Magnus! Help!" He called. He glanced back at his friends, satisfied with himself but when he noticed no one else was sharing the same satisfaction, he frowned. "Well, all right.. but I have another idea." He then faced the door again, ready to shout out a second time.

"Is it yelling for Ellegaard?" Olivia predicted, facepalming.

Axel's face fell as he scratched the back of his neck awkwardly. "Not.. anymore.." he murmured.

"Look, they aren't coming back," Lukas said. "We have no idea where they are."

"They couldn't abandon us, even if they wanted to!" Maggie protested. "I know my brother. And Ellegaard. Maybe. But they wouldn't sit around and give up with that monster still on the prowl!"

"Maggie's correct," Chris agreed. "Even despite their differences, they know the key reason why we're still here. I hope.."

Nikki was in thought, placing her hands on her hips. "I feel like they would know where we're at because we have Axel here being loud and annoying-."

"Hey!" Axel protested.

"-and they don't know enough about the Wither Storm yet," she finished. "They NEED us if they're going to take it down. And bonus: we have the key to finding Soren. Mini isn't here with us anymore so they're pretty much putting themselves in danger."

"Affirmative!" Chris grinned.

"Nice observation, Nikki," Maggie agreed, making Nikki blush slightly.

"But that still doesn't bring them any closer to us," Jess pointed out.

"No need for desperation, sis. As long as we have.. this!" Jesse said, reaching into his pocket and pulling out flint and steel. He looked confused when he noticed Nikki and Maggie both snickering at his mistake while Jess simply facepalmed, trying to distract herself from the secondhand embarrassment.

"Flint and steel? I don't get it," Olivia said, wondering if there was an inside joke that she didn't understand.

"If you're going to blow the bookshelf up with the flint and steel, then be my guest. I just hope Soren won't be too pissed about it," Maggie joked.

"It's not- that's not what I meant to pull out," Jesse said, feeling the embarrassment burning against him as he reached back in his pockets. "Hold on.. uh.."

"So much for the dramatic reveal, Jesse," Nikki teased.

"Oh yeah VERY dramatic indeed," Jess added.

"Oh, hush up," Jesse retorted before he held the amulet up high for everyone to see. "This!" The green and red bars of the Amulet were glowing brightly, alerting them that Magnus and Ellegaard were close; however, the lights suddenly faded out. Was it broken? Or were they out of range?

"Looks like it might be broken," Petra commented.

Lukas found this interesting, wondering what this might mean. "Here, let me see it. Maybe you're just holding it wrong," he said, trying to take the amulet but Jesse had a firm grip on it. Lukas tugged on the amulet, trying to get a closer look at it as he huffed in annoyance. He couldn't believe it. Was he being serious right now? He knew that Jesse hated him, but was he not allowed to use the amulet? He couldn't hog all of the leadership!

"Do you mind?" Jesse hissed.

"I just- want to- see it."

"You could see it without touching."

"Not if you can't get it to work."

"It's working fine!"

"Oh my lord, will you two shut the fuck up already?!" Maggie shouted, making the two flinch in alarm as they glanced over at her. For the first time, she looked annoyed and she even felt tempted to snatch the Amulet away so they would stop fighting over it. "Honestly! What is UP with everyone fighting all the time? Can I not get a moment of peace without anyone arguing over something stupid? If he wants to use the Amulet, then let him USE it."



"Right. You guys have been at each other's throats this ENTIRE time. If they can't handle being in the same room for a few minutes then you guys are just childish. Talk about 'unreliable,'" Nikki scowled, referencing Jesse's words back in the hut that was obviously directed at Lukas. "First the Hut, then at the Temple, and now here? C'mon, guys! Is this what the world is expecting to see? Did you guys forget we're probably like the last survivors willing to bring the Storm to an end? Soren is NEVER going to help us at this rate."

Both Jesse and Lukas looked guilty, Lukas letting go of the Amulet as a moment of silence filled the room. Nikki was right about one thing: it's up to them to stop the Storm from reducing the world to bedrock. They already lost Gabriel, and Magnus and Ellegaard aren't going to be any help. The silence was suddenly broken by the Amulet as the white bar glowed brightly. This could only be one thing; Soren.

"Soren!" He exclaimed.

"Find him, Jesse. Maybe he can help us," Petra suggested as she stepped forward to take a closer look.

He was just about to follow its trail, but to avoid him and Lukas bickering over it again, Nikki snatched it from his grasp. "Gimme that!" She huffed before following where she needed to go.

The Amulet started pulsing as soon as she found the spot. It wasn't exactly an exit so they had to dig their way through. "This is the spot. It has to be."

"Maybe.." Axel murmured.

"This is definitely it," Jess agreed, going by her sister's side. "Get ready to dig, people."

"Who knows how far down that goes?" Lukas asked, having doubts about this new plan. "We might end up digging until we hit bedrock."

"Anyone else have a better plan?" Nikki asked, scanning around the room.

"Nikki's talking to you, Lukas," Olivia huffed.

"I know- I just.. need a.." the blonde started but was interrupted by Axel punching the brick floor with ease. It didn't lead to anything, yet the Amulet continued pulsing.

"Let's get to it then," Jesse urged them. With that, everyone started to dig the stone blocks by hand. Nikki did most of the work because she still had her pickaxe that could mine the blocks faster and once they were done, they found a massive hole in the ground that was pitch black.

Nikki, who was about three feet from the ground, held the Amulet up to try and make out what was in the hole but to no avail. It was impossible to tell what was hidden inside the depths of the hole.

"Are we cool?" Axel called from the top.

"Can you spot anything?" Chris inquired.

"It's a hole," Jess replied.

"Does that mean we're cool?" Axel asked.

"We'll find out!" Jesse responded. He started studying the hole, at least.. from what they could see from where they were, which wasn't much. Nikki however started to get impatient and hopped down, scanning around her new surroundings curiously.

"Nikki! You sure that was a smart move?" Jess called down for her.

"What else can there be down here?" Nikki huffed. "Looks pretty good! Uhh.. it's dark, but other than that we're okay."



"Heading down!" Maggie called, she and Olivia began to climb down to join her.

"Don't look up!" Olivia said as soon as the three glanced up at her. "I've got to work up the nerve."

Nikki sighed but flinched when she heard a sound from the hole she was in. "Wait!" She called.

"You have to say that now?!" Jesse huffed.

"Something's not right."

It turns out her voice startled a bunch of resting bats and soon, they started flying all around her, flying all over her face and blocking away what she could see. Nikki screamed, trying her best to deal with her awkward situation.

"Get away! It touched me! I touched it! AHH!"

During the middle of this, Zephyr flew down, squeaking with mild interest, delighted at seeing his kind. Or at least partially of his kind. Wanting to help his owner, he got the bats' attention and led them away, the bats flying outside of what seemed to be a tunnel.

Once the bats were out of the cave, Jesse and Jess hopped down to join their youngest sister and made sure she was okay before Jesse advised them that they should come down in pairs. Chris and Maggie went down first, then Lukas and Olivia, and then finally, Petra and Axel. Axel fell right onto Lukas as Petra stumbled, Nikki helping her to stay stable.

Reuben oinked gently, Jesse rubbing his side affectionately, giving him the comfort he needed before standing back up on his feet. "Everyone okay?" He asked. He gave Petra a worried glance noticing how much her sickness is affecting her. After shoving Axel off him, Lukas gave her a skeptical look. When Petra caught note of this, she tried to play it cool.

"I just slipped," she assured the group. Lukas was getting more and more suspicious and even Olivia started to get skeptical though she let it go as a putrid smell filled her nostrils.

"What's that smell?" She asked, disgusted.

"Just breathe through your mouth," Maggie shrugged.

"Let's get out of here," Nikki said as Jesse led the group. The tunnel they were in was dark and damp and following the route the bats took, the team silently went ahead and went along. The silence made Jesse uncomfortable as he continued leading. He wasn't sure where they were going or even if they were heading the right way or not but considering that the white bar was still glowing vividly, he suspected they were close.

The silence was broken by Nikki, who pointed a finger up ahead. "Guys look! There's a light at the end of the tunnel!" She beamed. Instinctively, the team raced forward toward the bright light. They expected it to be the key to finding Soren or at least an exit, but instead, it led them to an edge? Olivia and Chris came forward to peer at the new scenery they were in and as soon as their eyes landed on the new place they were in, their eyes widened in horror.

They seemed to be in somewhere that resembled the inside of a machine, with other tunnel mouths similar to theirs however water poured out of the other ones, bringing along hostile mobs such as spiders and zombies, and at the bottom was a series of pistons that mashed up the monsters, killing them and what they dropped fell in water tubes below.



◦●●◉❀ Chapter 2: Happy Grinding! ❀◉●●◦

"We have to get out of here," Olivia warned.

"What?!" Lukas said, unable to hear her through the water flows and mashing.

"We have to get out of here!" Olivia repeated herself, raising her voice so her friends could hear her better.

"We just got here!" Axel protested.

"You don't understand.. This is a Grinder!"

"They're meant to kill monsters and take their loot," Chris explained. "Trouble is, they can't tell the difference between monsters and people!"

"This can't be good," Jess whimpered.

"But there should be a loot room down there, right?" Axel asked, his eyes sparkling in excitement at the thought of seeing the room where all the loot is stored. "Just saying.. not all bad."

"What's a grinder doing down here?" Jesse wondered.

"Not just any grinder.. this is the craziest one I've ever seen," Chris replied. "It has to be Soren's."

"Well, we came this far," Maggie shrugged. "We can't just stop now!"

"Yep. Soren will be missed. The whole world too," Axel agreed. Before the group could do anything, they suddenly heard the familiar sound of hissing creepers. When they whipped their heads around, they spotted multiple creepers heading right for them.

"Creepers!" Jess cried as she drew out her sword. Her siblings and Petra did as well and together they started taking down the explosive mobs. Jess was almost surprised to see Jesse and Petra together, looking as though they'd always been fighting monsters together.

After killing a creeper in one bow, Petra noticed one of the creepers pulsing, signaling that it was about to explode. "Duuuuck!" She warned. Jess, who was the closest to it, moved out of the way as the creeper exploded, killing the remaining creepers in the area, but it left an open hole in the tube they were in. It was out of range so technically they were safe. Or so they thought..

"There he is.. He's right down-." Nikki said, hovering the Amulet over the hole but was interrupted by a water fissure that sent a current straight for them. Everyone managed to stand their ground, but Jess slipped, collapsing on top of Nikki as the two slid dangerously close to the hole.

As quick as ocelots, Axel and Maggie raced forward and helped them onto their feet, however, Nikki gasped when she realized she dropped something. She didn't realize what it was until she patted her pockets, feeling a hard pit in her stomach. The Amulet fell right from her hands and rolled down in the hot spot inside the grinder, disappearing out of sight. Nikki raced for the edge to see where it had landed but her sunken feeling deepened as she realized she couldn't locate where it was.

"Was that-?" Olivia started.

"The Amulet," Nikki sighed. "Yes."

"Well? What are we waiting for?" Maggie said urgently as she and Nikki raced back to the hole.

"We have to get the Amulet before we lose it!" Nikki agreed.

"Wait! Are you guys going to jump?" Chris fretted. "You're going to jump, aren't you?"

"My dear Chrissy, the jumping is the easy part," Maggie teased. "It's the landing that's hard."

Maggie has Magnus' enthusiasm for jumping into danger. Without another word, she and Nikki hopped down and landed on the platform below. Jesse, Jess, and Petra shared worried glances before hopping after them. Jess watched how Maggie threw TNT at some upcoming



zombies in their way, killing a couple from impact and sending the rest flying into the depths below. Petra whacked down a creeper, making it explode and creating another tunnel, where zombies came marching out.

Maggie and Nikki went on their way as Jess, Jesse and Petra stopped by a staircase that led to another platform. A creeper stood right there and before it could dash at them, Jesse claimed it and sent it flying towards a wall, where it exploded.

"Dude, this is so much fun!" Maggie laughed as she, the siblings, Olivia, and Chris ran down a different direction, however, Chris and Jess froze when they heard Axel screaming. The two spotted a zombie cornering him and acting fast, they raced towards the zombie and together, pushed it off the edge before their friend could get hurt.

"Jess! Chris! Get down!" Axel ordered. Although they were confused, they did as they were told and ducked. Axel punched a zombie that was heading for them, making it fly above them and off the edge. Axel beamed in glory from this defeat, a proud grin spreading across his face.

"Who wants more?!"

Chris glanced at him in disbelief. "You're asking for more?!" He said as the trio dashed down a couple of stairs.

"Uh, no! I was... just in the heat of the moment."

"Whatever you say, buddy," Jess sighed. Once they were on a different platform, they were barely able to dodge an incoming arrow from a skeleton.

"Hey, ugly!" Nikki's voice called to the skeleton. She slid into the scene, dodging an incoming arrow, and hit it off the edge. Seeing that they had it covered, Jess glanced over and spotted Lukas kicking away from a bunch of cave spiders. She immediately rushed in to aid him, one of the spiders spotting her and lunged at her instead but Jess ducked, the spider falling off the edge instead.

She ran towards the blonde and tried to ask about his condition, but he was too busy shaking and backing away. Jess whipped her head around and spotted several more cave spiders crawling out from the wall, hopping off and advancing on them. But before they could attack, another water stream came down.

"Hold on!" Jess warned, sheathing her sword and bracing herself for impact.



"Whoa!" Lukas yelled as the water carried them off their feet and onto the edge. Luckily, they managed to get a tight grip on the edge while the spiders were taken away by the water. Once it was over, Jess tried to pull herself back up, but the edge was too slippery.

"Easy, easy, easy. I gotcha," Lukas said, taking her hand and pulling her up.

"Thanks, Lukas-" Jess tried to thank him but was cut off when she heard Reuben squealing in alarm. She whipped her head around and spotted Nikki, Maggie, and Petra trying their best to fight off a horde as Axel hid behind them, holding Reuben in his arms.

"Reuben! Nikki! You guys stay there, okay?" Jess cried. She then heard a familiar glow and soon spotted the Amulet nearby.

"The Amulet!" Lukas said, pointing at the pulsing amulet down below. "It's over there. But.. We can't just leave the rest alone, right?"

Jess didn't know how to answer. Jesse, Olivia, and Chris weren't much help either since they were all too busy fighting against a bunch of zombies. It was up to her. It was either to save her sister and friends or save the Amulet. To make matters worse, a current of water suddenly flowed and pushed the Amulet dangerously close to their edge. After making her decision, she faced Lukas with a determined expression.

"I've got to help them!" Jess said.

"But what about the Amulet?" Lukas questioned.

"You go get it! Nikki, Reuben, I'm coming!"

With that, the two separated, Jess, hopping down to help save her sister and friends as Lukas wasted no time bolting for the Amulet. "Get away from my sister!" Jess huffed, kicking down one of the zombies and stabbing it, killing it instantly before dealing with the rest of the mobs. Nikki had slashed down a creeper, taking it down before it had the chance to explode.

"Get down!" Maggie ordered, the sisters did as she told as she tossed TNT at the monsters, sending them flying off the edge. Once all the beasts had been cleared, the gang took a breather, gaining back their energy.

"Everyone okay..?" Jess asked.

"Not dead. Yet. That's pretty cool," Maggie replied.

"We could've handled it," Nikki frowned.

"Damn. Is that the 'thanks' I get?" Jess joked. Before Nikki could retort, a current of water streamed down again. Axel managed to stand strong against the current, and he picked Maggie, Nikki, and Reuben up so they would be safe. Jess held onto a fence post and held Petra's hand to avoid her from falling off the edge.

As the water was coming to a stop, they suddenly heard an explosion followed by a scream. They frantically whipped their heads towards the sound and spotted a creeper hole with Jesse falling off the edge and falling into the water tide below, disappearing in one of the hoppers.

"Jesse! NO!" Nikki cried, struggling out of Axel's grasp and jumping in after him.

"Nikki!" Maggie wept, freeing herself from Axel's grasp and following after her. If it wasn't for the endless mobs pouring out of the tunnels and the fact that she could get mashed up by the piston below, Jess would've immediately hopped in as well.

She felt herself trembling as she felt herself freezing in place, unable to think of what to do. She panicked, feeling her breathing quicken as she tried to pace her thoughts but to no avail. She flinched when she felt someone hold her hand and glancing to see who it was, she saw Lukas standing next to her, giving her a comforting look, silently assuring her that everything was okay.

Jess was still a little shaken but felt some sort of warmth come to her as she stared into his ocean-blue eyes. Being close to him gave her warmth and protection.. and although it confused her, she was able to regain herself. Whatever Lukas had done, it was enough to alert her back to her senses.

The two hopped down together, falling into the depths below, the rest of the team following them. For a moment, Jess felt as though she was falling into space, gripping Lukas' hand tightly as the two flew through the air together. Once they reached the pool below them, for a moment they thought they were safe until Reuben was sucked into a tube.

Jess was alarmed, trying her best to stay with Lukas but the two were separated as a spider attacked her, attempting to drown her. She held her breath and with some effort, pried the spider off her and sent it into the tube. Relieved, she searched for the rest of the team but was confused to find that no one was with her. Where did everyone go? Her answer came as she felt a tight current pulling her into a tube. She tried her best to swim away, but the tug was too strong, and it swept her away, taking her to only lord knows where..

◦●●◎❁ Chapter 3: Childhood Issues 2.0 ❁◎●●◦

Jesse groaned as he landed on his stomach, Reuben landing right on top of him. He had escaped the Grinder and now found himself in a sorting room with endless storage chests and water tubes carrying items from one place to another. He had to admit, it reminded him of Redstonia. It kinda looked like Redstonia too, just without the red and yellow accents.

As he scanned the room, he noticed Nikki there with him, holding Zephyr in her hands and drying him off. He had passed out due to water damage and after she was done drying him off, she gently let him rest in her pocket. When she noticed Jesse had awakened, she walked up to him and helped him onto his feet.

"Glad you're alive," she said.

"Uh-huh.." Jesse murmured. "Where are we?"

Before she responded, they suddenly heard a loud whoosh sound. The two



looked above them just in time, they jumped out of the way as a water current poured the rest of the team out and onto the floor. They all groaned in pain from the impact, looking rattled but no one seemed to be hurt.

"Ow! I thought water was supposed to break a fall," Lukas huffed.

"Hey guys? Where's Axel?" Nikki asked, realizing the big guy wasn't here with them.

"I could've sworn he was right behind me up there.." Olivia remembered. Right on cue, they heard Axel screaming from the ceiling above and landed on top of Lukas. At first, he was shaken but he tried to hide it as he gave his friends an assuring expression.

"No, no. Don't worry. I'm totally fine," Axel said.

"Why..?" Lukas groaned.

"Oh, crap. I'm sorry," Axel then apologized, lifting himself off him before offering his hand to help him up. For a moment, Jess thought he was being genuine but was proven wrong when he turned away and focused his attention on Reuben instead, leaving the blonde to slip once more. He held the little piglet in his arms as he gave Jess a wide grin. "I knew you'd come for us, Jess. I just knew it. Reuben had his doubts. I owe you."

"I'm just glad you're okay," Jess assured them. "Both of you. And Maggie and Petra. That goes for you too, bro." She glanced at Jesse, who seemed surprised by this.

"Thanks, Jess. There's something different about you guys."

"Really?" Jesse raised a brow.

"He's right," Nikki agreed. "I mean, look at us! We used to be just normal civilians living in a treehouse, daydreaming about the Order, living normal lives.. and now we're here working for them."

"Nikki has a point. We faced and did a lot of things I didn't even know we could do," Jess agreed. "Who knows what might happen next?"

"..not exactly.. I don't know how to explain things well, but you're forgetting something. The world is in serious trouble and not even the greatest are enough to stop it," Jesse said. "Gabriel is already gone and so are countless other people. We're all the world has to give, I guess."

"Sure.." Jess sighed. "But why us?"

"Right. And why now..?" Nikki added. "We're not even experienced in high-level stuff like this."

Jesse pondered on their questions for a moment. He couldn't help but admit that his sisters were right about one thing; even though the world was relying on them, they were still a couple

of teenagers that haven't even reached past the age of eighteen. "Well-." He started but was cut off by Axel, who spotted loot being carried under the glass floor below.

"Hold on, hold on, hold on, hold on, hold on," he gasped. "This is where all the loot gets sorted, right?"

"That's exactly what it is," Chris confirmed.

"See what? Things are starting to turn around!" He beamed, pushing by the siblings, who scowled at his rudeness.

"What a beautiful conversation between siblings ruined by the fat guy," Nikki joked. Her siblings snickered at her comment. Jess had to admit to herself that it felt nice to smile after all the drama and stress they'd been through.

"Hey, Nikki?" Maggie said, grabbing her attention. "Hey. Back in the Grinder, it was SO much fun! I'm.. impressed by what happened back there."

Nikki felt her heart flutter as she grinned. "Thanks. You were pretty cool up there too, Mags. With the TNT? You got to show me some techniques," she replied.

"Yeah? Yeah? Magnus taught me a while back. Maybe when all this is over, I'll show you how to grief better. Or IF it's all over," the griever offered before she placed her hands on her shoulders,



a wide smile spreading across her face. This time, it wasn't mischievous or anything. This time, it looked genuine. "I'm really glad I got to meet you, Nikki. Lots of shitty things happened, but hey, bright things happen too, right? It's nice to be able to experience things outside of what I'm used to."

Nikki felt her face burn up as her smile widened. "R-Really-? I mean, it was nice knowing you too, Mags. Just a hunch, but it must be pretty cool being you, huh?" She said, her emerald green eyes locking with her chocolate brown ones.

Maggie was caught by surprise by the compliment but grinned as she nudged her playfully. "Thanks. It must be cool being you too," she replied.

"Maggie's right. It was cool what you did up there," Petra complimented as she trotted towards them. Jesse felt his face warm up slightly by this. The redhead was soaked, but she didn't mind it too much. "We stick together, and we'll be fine."

"You feeling any better?" Jesse asked, concerned.

"Not even a little bit. And now I'm wet."

"I'm pretty sure we're ALL wet," Maggie commented.

Petra ignored her, focusing all her attention on Jesse as her dark eyes sparkled. "Speaking of which.. I noticed something," she smiled. "Everyone's looking at you to lead." She then froze, peeking over at someone nearby. "Well, actually.. maybe not everyone."

Jesse shifted his gaze towards Lukas, seeing that he held the Amulet and was pointing it in different directions. "Looks like it's still working," he observed. Jesse scowled, his blood boiling as he glared at him.

Jess didn't seem to notice this and a smile formed on her face as she trotted towards him. "Hey, thanks for grabbing that up there. Can I have it back?" She giggled.

Lukas frowned slightly, feeling bummed out that he wouldn't have a chance to lead the group but he was just glad to see that Jess was doing okay. "Not a problem," he said, handing the Amulet back to her. When he noticed the bandages on her arm, his eyes narrowed in concern.

"Jess, how's your arm doing? Were you careful when we were back in the Grinder? Here, let me help you."

"I'll be fine, Lukas," Jess assured him. "But thanks for caring. I-.. it means a lot."

"It's.. well.." the blonde scratched the back of his neck nervously as he gave her a warm smile.

"It's the least I could do." Reuben went up to him and started rubbing his head against his leg. Lukas was caught by surprise by this, but he chuckled as he rubbed his head affectionately.

"Awww, I think he likes you," Jess cooed.

"I think I'm starting to like him too," Lukas beamed.

Jesse felt his eye twitch in annoyance as he glared at the two. It was enough that his sister was getting all friendly with Lukas, but it made it worse now that Reuben was growing close to him as well. "Hey! Don't touch my pig," he huffed as he stomped over to the two.

"Jesse, no need to cause a ruckus," Jess frowned, trying not to start an argument but Lukas, being fed up, wasn't going to let that slide. Reuben was startled by the sudden change in the mood and out of fear, hid behind Jess.



"Maybe he's his own pig, Jesse. You ever thought of that?" Lukas retorted.

"You heard what I said," Jesse scoffed, gently pushing his middle sister to the side to have a one-on-one conversation with his childhood ex-friend. "Remember what I said before? Keep your distance."

"Y'know what? What's your problem?!" The blonde snarled. "You have been being an asshole to me this ENTIRE time for literally NO reason!"

"No reason? NO reason?" Jesse repeated in disbelief. "Have you ever thought about looking in the mirror lately because if you can't see the problem, then you're blind. All you care about is yourself and then you expect someone to come after you like a little maid. I've had it! Don't you get it? Gabriel is dead because of you!"

"Listen, I was scared, okay? I was just trying to help! At least I'm not the one throwing shade at people because of pointless shit. Maybe if you weren't too busy with your head up your ass, you will see that I've changed. I'm trying to do better!"

"Pointless-?' See, this is why I don't want you to step a FOOT near my sisters or friends!" Jesse shouted and although he was filled with anger, his eyes began to water as he stared at his so-called friend. "You never thought of taking the blame? You think you're this perfect little Angel? Guess what! You're not! How could I trust someone who picked the side of someone who was tormenting me for YEARS and let it continue? Someone who claims to be a good person yet lets the people you see as friends are constant assholes to my family AND friends! You'll NEVER get it! We were NEVER friends. And we NEVER were!"

Lukas felt his heart shatter from his last words. This entire time, he was trying to make peace with his old friend, trying to show him that he's changed and trying to make up for what he did in the past. But now, all his efforts have been for nothing because all he did was make Jesse despise him even more.

"Jesse.." he croaked. "I-.."

"You what? You think just because you have my sister kissing your ass that it'll fix all the shitty things you did, that it'll remove all the trauma and insecurities I had to go through because of you?" Jesse said, tears starting to run down his cheeks. "Then you must be a fool for thinking that. Because no matter what you do, I'll always see you as the bitch you are."

A long, uncomfortable silence sat across the room as no one dared to speak another word. Lukas couldn't answer, a wave of repentance washing over him as he stared at the ground. He didn't bother to make eye contact, for he felt like it'll only make things worse than they already were.

Everyone else in the room felt tense and even Jess was stunned by the argument, feeling the guilt eating her awake. She focused so much on Lukas that she didn't even realize the pain her brother went through. And yet, she thought Jesse was in the wrong. The silence was suddenly interrupted by a loud groaning sound that echoed through the walls of the loot room.

"Sounds like the Grinder is backed up," Olivia said, though she still felt tense from the fierce argument.

"With loot?" Axel guessed, though he didn't seem as excited and sounded as though he was simply trying to distract himself.

When the water stream poured into the room, it was revealed that it didn't come with loot and instead came with more monsters! After a short, yet intense battle, the team raced ahead and managed to break out and enter a small room.

"There's one thing I hate! It's running and monsters," Axel complained as they ran up a set of stairs that led them to a glistening portal that resembled the night sky.

"Holy crap.." Chris breathed. "An End Portal..?"

"Who cares what it is?" Nikki said. "It's our ticket out of here!"

"Wait.. what.. look.." Lukas suddenly gasped, looking back down the staircase. Jesse scowled, wondering what he wanted as he looked back as well and spotted Petra struggling to hold back a couple of zombies and one even knocked her down.

Jesse's eyes widened in alarm before he raced forward to save the redhead. "Petra!" He cried. "Get away from her!" He sliced the first zombie down then found himself dodging skeleton arrows before taking them out as well. Jesse was surprised with himself but was proud as he started to cheer. "In your face, monsters!" He grinned. "I think I'm starting to get the hang of it. Geez, I guess those lessons paid off!"

He then reached down and helped Petra back onto her feet. Once she was safe, he spotted many more mobs approaching them from the loot room. Taking her hand, he dashed back towards the portal, joining the others.

"Wait!" Petra said as Jesse tugged her along. "None of us have been to the End before! Are you sure about this?!"

Jesse gave her an assuring smile. "Whatever we do, we do it together!" He said, remaining her of her own words when they were escaping the monsters on the bridge. Petra felt her heart flutter at this, but without another word, the two joined their friends. The monsters were ganging up on them. It was now or never.

"Jump!" Jesse ordered and without saying it twice, the gang leaped into the End Portal, finding themselves in a dark and distant world.

◦●●◦❁ Chapter 4: Into the Unknown ❁◦●●◦

For a few seconds, Nikki found herself in a sparkling, black void. Then, she found herself landing on yellowish stone bricks that resembled sponges. She suspected she was standing on endstone that Velvet once told her about. She was almost surprised that what she saw was on the other side. It was dark and desolate, with hardly any life ever to be found. Nikki scanned their surroundings. Through the mist that covered the area, she spotted tall, obsidian pillars around the area and noticed they were standing on one of the islands floating in nothingness. Jesse was observing their surroundings as well, standing in front of the group to continue to lead.

"Whoa.." Jess gasped.

"Oh. Great. It just keeps getting better," Maggie commented.

As soon as she came across, Olivia glanced around and noticed someone was missing. "Where's Axel? He was right behind me," she questioned.

Right on cue, Axel teleported in, landing on Lukas.

"HA! See? I told you I'd pay you back," he beamed.

"Get off.." Lukas grunted, shoving the big guy off him. It seemed as though everyone had forgotten about the explosive argument prior, but he knew deep down that no one had forgotten it. He was scared of what everyone must think of him now; especially Jess.

He had gotten so close to finally proving that he was trying to become a better person and yet, all that has gone down the drain. He tried to distract himself from the argument, but spotted what was ahead of them and immediately ducked under his arms, terrified.



"Ah! Oh, jeez.." he whimpered.

Despite not being sure if she could trust him, Jess' eyes filled up with concern. "Are you hurt..?" She asked.

"What-? No, I'm not crying, just- Look!" The blonde fretted, pointing behind them. The sisters shared perplexed glances before slowly turning their heads to see what he was pointing at. There they were; a flock of Endermen behind them. When the sisters spotted them, they immediately turned back around with terrified expressions.

"Hide!" Jesse ordered in a whisper, the gang shielding their eyes as they ducked behind an obsidian pillar and away from danger. For now.

"So what do we call 'em? A 'herd' of Endermen?" Maggie wondered out loud. "A flock of Endermen? A swarm?"

"It's a 'haunting' of Endermen," Nikki suggested. "Or a shit ton of Endermen."

"Language!" Jesse scolded. "Call it whatever you want. As long as we don't look at them we'll be fine."

"Sorry."

"We might want to hold off on the grammar lessons until later," Olivia advised. "Which way are we headed, Jess?"

Jess pulled out the Amulet. The white bar glowed for a few seconds before fizzling out. No matter how many times she shook or hit it, it won't turn back on.

"Items like that doesn't work in the Nether," Chris reminded them. "Perhaps not the End, either."

"Great. Whoo, man," Lukas laughed in disbelief. "So we were trapped, and now we're lost. So, we go from, uh.. a death machine, that almost drowns us.. and we land here. In the End."

"At least we're alive.. and well," Maggie shrugged although Petra nor Lukas seemed convinced. "Soren's gotta be close by. This island ain't that big anyway."

"We just gotta keep truckin' til we get to Soren," Jess added.

"Face it guys, we might never find this guy," Lukas sighed.

"There he is!" Maggie suddenly exclaimed, pointing at a man with ginger hair climbing up a set of stairs to a floating building. It was sort of hard to see through the mist, but the team managed to spot him perfectly.

"Did that just happen? I can't believe that just happened," Axel gasped.

"Yes, how convenient," Chris raised a brow.

"That has to be Soren. Who else will build a staircase in the End?" Jesse said.

"That's got to be him," Petra agreed.

Jesse glanced back up, noticing that he disappeared up to the top of the building. "We've gotta go," he said urgently.

"Everyone! Follow me!" Petra ordered, stepping up to lead the group. "I'll get us to the other side! Just stay behind me and we'll-.." she was interrupted by a cough. "We'll be fine!" Although she tried to seem tough, the siblings knew that deep down, she wouldn't be able to lead.

"That's not a good idea," Nikki said, pulling her back. "But that's okay. There's only one guy who can get us through those endermen alive."

"Well, now, sis.." Jesse grinned, seemingly proud. "I'm flattered by the compliment. I'd be glad to get us through-."

"Huh? What? No, screw YOU," Nikki huffed, sticking out her arm so someone else could land on it. "I'm talking about Zephyr!"

"The bat?" Lukas shot, bewildered. "A bat could get us through those things?!"

"Hello? Ender runs through his blood!" Nikki explained. "If an Enderman looks at him, they wouldn't care. He'll get us to those stairs, no sweat!"

The blonde wasn't buying it and stepped up instead. "Actually.. y'know what? I'll just go," he offered, giving Jess a side glance in hopes she'll understand. "Give me a chance."

"Everyone, follow Lukas and Zephyr! And let's pick up the pace, okay?" Jess said, allowing them both to lead. Lukas was deeply surprised by this but he smiled a little, trying his best to ignore the glare Jesse gave him as the team began to follow his and Zephyr's lead.

As they escaped the horde of Endermen, Zephyr was able to guide the blonde, showing him the correct way so he could help the rest of the team behind them. Once they were safe on the other side, everyone breathed a heavy sigh of relief.

"Nice moves back there, blondie," Maggie complimented.

"Thanks. I couldn't have done it without him," Lukas admitted, giving Zephyr a small smile as Nikki came and scratched the little bat's ears. "I guess I was wrong about him." He then glanced at Jess. "And you too, Jess. I--.. thanks for giving me a shot."

"No worries, Lukas," Jess assured him. Although she wanted answers about what Jesse meant during the explosive argument he and Jesse had, she figured it wasn't the right time to ask yet.

"All that matters is that we made it," Jesse huffed, pushing past the others and marching up the long staircase. It was so long in fact, Axel already started breathing heavily after just the first flight of stairs.

"I hope that someday I love something as much as Soren seems to love stairs," he gasped. He was right since the staircase was so long, it felt as though they were climbing to the heavens. Jesse was unsure why he had so many stairs, but at the same time, they WERE in the End. Maybe it was to keep the Endermen out?

'C'mon, girl.. just a little further..' Petra thought to herself, forcing herself to continue up the steps although she hardly had the strength to. Her arm was the least of her worries now. She didn't want to slow the team down, especially since they were very close to finding Soren. It didn't hide that she was falling behind with no choice but to keep moving. When they got to the third flight of stairs, she knew that she needed a break.

"Jesse, can you.. give me a second..?" She panted as she sat down, wiping sweat from her forehead. Since she noticed that Jesse was just ahead of her, she hoped that he'll wait for her.

"Need a hand?" Jesse said, offering his hand out to her. Although she desperately wanted his help, she couldn't find the courage to say it.

"No, no. I can manage, thanks," she tried to assure him. When she noticed his worried expression, she went on. "Really. I'm fine. I'm good, I'm good. We can keep moving."

Jesse didn't hesitate. He sat next to her, at first staying quiet before he finally spoke. "Petra, I'm your best friend. We BOTH know you're lying."

"And what if I am? You have bigger things to worry about. Like finding Soren? Or that argument you had with Lukas? I know you guys had a messy.. friendship but was that really necessary?"

"..maybe it was uncalled for, but I don't care. I don't want him anywhere near my friends or siblings. Not after what he did.."

"I can understand that.. but can't you at least try and talk things through? He and Jess are already getting close and you know how Jess can be."

"You're right. Jess has no idea what happened between Lukas and me. Maybe if things were different then.. maybe one day I'll be able to tolerate him."

"But Jesse? Shouldn't you-."

"I have nothing to apologize for," Jesse's eyes shone with anger and sadness, remembering the heartache and trauma he went through at the hands of his old friend. Without saying another word about the topic, he then took Petra's hand and carefully helped her onto her feet. "We should get going before the rest wonder where we're at. You could lean on me for support."

"I-.." Petra was about to say, but considering she didn't want to upset him by discussing the topic any further, she decided to keep it to herself. "I already said I could handle myself. You don't have to be a caring dork, y'know!"

"And you don't have to do things yourself, sweetie," Jesse scoffed playfully. Although he sounded like he was being sarcastic, Petra couldn't help but feel her heart fluttering at the compliment. She didn't say another word as they ventured towards the top and once they made it, they noticed everyone else was there, looking extremely worn out.

Little did they know, Lukas had been watching them and overhearing their conversation. Trying to push his guilt aside, his suspicions rose as he eavesdropped. He knew something was going on, and it seems as though Jesse was trying to keep it secret.

"Such an unreasonable amount of stairs.." Chris grunted as he slowly got onto his feet. The gang shifted their gazes onto the ladder in front of them. Chris hoped that it wasn't a long one since he had enough climbing for one day.

"There's a ladder," Jess panted.

"Well, no shit," Nikki huffed.

"Language!" Jesse scolded.

"Sorry."

"It better not be a long one," Axel hoped.

"Whatever this is.. looks like that's the way in," Chris observed.

"Welp, after you, big bro," Nikki said, stepping aside to let her older brother climb the stairs first.

"Oh, no, no!" Jesse protested, pushing Nikki to the ladder instead. "Ladies first."

"Oh, NO," Nikki refused, flipping behind Jesse and pushing him towards the ladder again. "Age before beauty."

"Shortie before the handsome," Jesse huffed, pulling the same move and pushing her towards the ladder.

"Hey! That's not a gesture!"

"It IS now get going, half-pint"

"YOU go!"

They kept trying to push each other to the ladder until they tripped over each other and landed in a heap. Petra couldn't help but chuckle from their silliness, watching them groan as they got up. She was especially entertained when she noticed Jess facepalming, a massive wave of secondhand embarrassment washing over her.

She noticed that Maggie and Axel were snickering too, Olivia's face reading: "are you guys being deadass right now?" And Chris and Lukas both looked confused, wondering how the siblings could ever work together if they were busy doing silly things like this.

"I'll go!" Jess huffed, shoving her siblings out of the way and climbing up the ladder. She felt embarrassed by the way her siblings were acting but pushed that aside as she disappeared out of sight. Her siblings were both silently losing it at the bottom but Nikki managed to keep a calm demeanor.

As soon as she climbed to the top, Jess had to shield her eyes from the sudden intense brightness. They spent so long in the dark depths of the End, she needed a moment to get used to her new surroundings. When she did, she scanned the new environment in awe, wondering how Soren was able to pull it off.

"What do you see, sis?" Nikki called.

"It's the most beautiful place I've ever seen!" She gasped.



Nikki was the next to climb up, having to get used to their new environments as well but unlike Jess, she was more confused than impressed. "I think I must be.. seeing things.." she murmured.

They found themselves back home in the Overworld, but it didn't seem like how it was before they entered Soren's fortress. It seemed.. normal with mountains, trees, and even a bridge sitting above a river. They could even spot a window with Redstone lamps inside it and they were so in awe of it, Nikki even wondered if they had teleported back home and were now probably miles away from home, away from the dark beast.

"It's like another world up there. A brand-new, totally unspoiled world," Nikki gasped before glancing at her sister. "What could this mean?"

"So bright.." Lukas grunted, shielding his eyes as he and the others climbed inside. As they all glanced around, Axel tripped and ended up bumping into Lukas, the two landing in a heap.

"That's my body, Axel," Lukas grunted. "My broken, battered body."

Jess ignored their conversation, staring at one of the trees. It was weird. It looked like a tree but it didn't FEEL like a tree. "Hang on a second.." she murmured.

"Right? The ground is almost.. squishy. Like carpet," Olivia observed.

"It looks funny too," Axel agreed. "Hey! I can see again."

"Glad to hear it. Now can you please get OFF me?" Lukas huffed.

"Sorry, dude."

"This doesn't look like a normal tree.." Jess muttered. She slowly brought her hands towards the tree bark and as soon as her fingers brushed against it, she gasped in surprise at how soft it was. Normal tree bark isn't this soft at all. "What in the- it's made of wool! This tree.. the grass.. it's all.. wool!"

"You're telling me, we've been resting all our hopes on this guy, and the whole time he's been building some.. totally artificial happyland?" Lukas said in disbelief, picking up a wool block that was dark green.

"Could it be that he just.. missed home?" Chris hesitated, sharing a nervous glance with Maggie. "He's been missing for years now. Not even Maggie and I could recall much about him."

"I dunno, Chris," Maggie frowned. "I mean, if you think about it, Soren is kinda whacked."

"If you miss home, you go and visit. You don't build an exact replica," Lukas grumbled before throwing the wool block away in frustration. "We came here for nothing! What are we even supposed to do now?"

Nikki has taken aback by the blonde's sudden outburst. "ExCUSE me, but I have NOT come this far to give up now!" She huffed. "We came here for Soren, and his Formidi-bomb. That's still the plan!"

"Just look around, Nikki! If the greatest builder of all time has spent years working on.. this, what're the chances he'll even have that bomb, huh?" Lukas fumed before storming away. "I've had enough crazy for one day!"

"What the hell is wrong with him?" Maggie asked as soon as he was out of earshot. "He seems pretty, I dunno.. upset?"

"Just.. give him some space," Jess sighed. "He'll be okay."

Jesse huffed at his sister's response. He didn't care enough about Lukas' sudden outburst and as the team began to split up, he noticed the Redstone lamps up above the wall flickering off. He was confused though felt like they needed to solve a puzzle of some sort. His attention shifted from the puzzle to Petra, who was standing alone and rubbing her arm to ease the pain. Jesse felt concern wash over him as he trotted over to go check on her.

"Hey, Petra," he greeted, getting her attention. "So on a scale from 'ugh' to 'argh,' how bad are you feeling?"

"Somewhere in between. But.. I'm holding on, for now," Petra responded.

"How d'you think Soren managed to get out of here without leaving any clues behind?"

Petra thought for a moment before responding. "He is the greatest builder of all time. If anyone knew how to put in the secret-est of secret doors, it's him."

"So I'm probably looking for..?"

"Well, to open a secret door.. you need a secret mechanism."

Jesse pondered on her answer for a moment before answering. "Maybe.." he murmured. "Have you seen anything weirder than this place?"

"Actually.. yeah," the redhead said. "I once saw a villager dig a huge trench and fill it with, like, a million carrots."

The two shared a small laugh, Petra feeling relieved which was the best she's been feeling so far. Everything has been so pressuring especially with her Wither Sickness bothering her, she almost forgot how it felt like to genuinely smile.

"I guess I'm going to keep looking around," Jesse said as soon as he regained his composure.

"Look away," Petra replied, the brunette taking his leave. She sighed as she leaned against the tree, wondering if this whole mission is truly going to be worth it in the end..

Jess had been observing the room, keeping a lookout for anything weird. She and Nikki had already worked together and found a lever and flickering it although nothing happened quite yet. They were confused but decided to split off in their directions to cover more ground.

Jess noticed Jesse finding another lever as well and activating it. Again, nothing happened but this time she noticed some Redstone lamps up above on the wall flashing on and off and although she didn't know what this meant, she knew it had to lead them somewhere.

As she searched, she noticed Reuben nearby staring at a pink wool block. Grinning, she went up to the little pig and rubbed his head lovingly. "Hey, Reuben!" She greeted before kneeling to his height. "High five Reuben!" The little pig stood on his hind legs as the two shared a high-five. Jess rubbed his head once more as she grinned. "You doing okay, buddy?"

Reuben smiled as he oinked, signaling that he was doing alright at the moment but still felt.. uneasy by their new surroundings and at the drama that had occurred so far. Jess couldn't blame him. With all the arguments and intensity, it felt like a gift to be able to genuinely smile. He then oinked in concern, rubbing his head against her bandaged arm.

"Don't worry about me, buddy. It's nothing I can't handle," Jess assured the little piglet before sighing. "I know I'm supposed to be looking for something, Reuben - any idea what?" Reuben huffed, pointing his head up at the redstone lamps behind the glass panes on the wall above them. "What's that, boy? You see something over there? Yeah, I think it's some sort of puzzle.. Well, I'm going to keep looking."

She then trotted away, leaving the piglet to continue staring at the pink wool block. When she noticed Axel and Olivia talking nearby, she approached them, wondering if they had found something.

"Thought you could trick me, huh, fake sun?" Axel said, staring up at a glowing block that was supposed to resemble a sun flying high above them. "Well, it's not gonna work." When he noticed Jess with them, he grinned. "What's up, Jess?"

"You guys doing okay?" Jess asked, wondering how her friends were holding up.

"Could be worse. Could be better," Axel shrugged.

"What Axel means is that we're both doing fine right now," Olivia replied, giving Axel a side glare before continuing. "It might change in the future though. It's best to keep our guards up."

"Found anything interesting?" Jess inquired.

"Just that button," Axel replied, pointing at a button sitting on the wall nearby.

"Doesn't really seem to do anything, though," Olivia added.

"Either of you guys know what's eating Lukas?" Jess then questioned.

"Well, as a longtime observer of human behavior.." Axel started.

"We have no idea," Olivia finished. "But try - y'know - talking to him. I-.." Olivia paused, glancing over at Jesse nearby before she continued. "He'll probably only talk to you. It'll probably won't fix things between.. you know who. But I'm getting tired of the whole drama thing."

"I think Jesse still has a reason to be mad," Axel huffed as he crossed his arms. "I know he told me not to tell you or Nikki, but he and Lukas have a lot of unfinished issues to work on. It's mainly frustrating when Lukas is obviously in the wrong yet Jesse gets punished for it."

Jess wondered what Axel meant but she didn't dare to question it since she felt like it wasn't her place to dig for information. She did feel guilty for not understanding why Jesse hated Lukas so much and looking back on it, she felt a hard pit in her stomach as she wondered how Jesse must've felt whenever she stuck up for Lukas. Perhaps she could try and end things between them, but how..?

"Okay, I'm gonna keep poking around. If you need anything, just shout," she said before soon taking her leave. Olivia's and Axel's words replayed in her head; not just about the mission, but also about the drama between Jesse and Lukas. She wanted to heal their relationship, but how was she going to do that if she didn't know what happened between them? She tried to put her thoughts aside as she approached the button sitting on the wall.

She figured this was what Axel and Olivia were talking about. She pressed it, testing to see if anything would happen but she was disappointed when nothing at all occurred. She was disappointed but heard soft noises that sounded like music on the other side of the wall. She pressed her head against it, hearing the soft beats playing on the other side of the wall. Jackpot! That's where they needed to head next.

She then trotted away, in search of the final lever but froze when she noticed Lukas leaning against a tree, looking glum. She frowned but remembering what Olivia said, she took a deep

breath and approached him. He noticed her approaching and as expected, he was less than pleased.

"What do you want?" He grumbled.

"I'm worried about you," Jess replied, giving him a concerned expression.

Lukas felt immense guilt wash over him as he refused to meet her worried gaze. He was glad that she still cared for him, but after all, he's done, part of him felt like he didn't deserve it, but he couldn't focus on that now. He had to focus on what was important.

"Listen, I know I've been prickly, okay? But.." he froze, finally glancing up at her and revealing his scared expression. "Jess, I think.. something's wrong. With Petra.." The two glanced over at Petra coughing in her arm, trembling slightly. "You have to have noticed. The lack of energy.. The labored breathing.."

"What.. exactly are you saying, Lukas?" Jess asked slowly, unsure if she could tell him the truth or not. Petra said she'd do it herself but she can't let her get worse without the others knowing.. Can she?

"There's something wrong! Okay? Something.. big," Lukas replied, frustrated. "It's not fooling anybody." He then stood a few steps away from her, facing his back toward her. "At least not me."

Jess nervously glanced at Petra nearby. She wouldn't like this, but she had to. Someone has to know. "Look, Lukas.. Petra's sick," she sighed.

She watched as his ocean-blue eyes widened at the discovery, uncrossing his arms as he processed the information before responding. "How long have you known..?"

"..A while. But she asked me, Jesse, and Nikki not to say anything. The Wither infected her with something."

Lukas' eyes flashed in remorse and shock as he refused to meet her gaze. "..so everything I was worried about - is true. T-This is my fault, Jess.." he murmured, his voice quavering as he curled up into a ball on the ground. "Petra's WitherSickness.. It's because of me."

Jess sat next to him, glancing up at him as she spoke. "So that's why you've been so angry? Because you feel.. guilty..?" She questioned, putting two-in-two together.

"I remember what you said when we were outside in the rain back at the Hut but.. if I hadn't choked, Jesse would've been able to pull Petra out of that tractor beam sooner - she would've been safe."

"For all we know, Petra didn't get sick until way after that!"

"..maybe.. you're right. But it's not just that. If only I wasn't so.. foolish. Jesse was right about one thing; I'm a coward. And I always was one."

"Lukas..?"



"I haven't been exactly honest with you. And I'm sure Jesse hasn't been exactly honest either. You'll.. probably hate me after this," Lukas sighed, but before he went on, Jess placed her hand on his cheek, making him look at her.

"Hey, whatever it is. You can tell me. I'll still love you for you, Lukas," she assured him, a warm smile resting on her face.

Lukas felt his heart flutter at this, but he quickly broke eye contact as he sighed. "Jesse and I didn't use to fight like this.. in fact, we used to be friends, besties even." Jess's eyes widened in surprise as he continued. "But something happened between us that.. ruined our friendship. A mistake that haunts me to this day. Every time I look back at it, it eats away at my flesh.. because I knew it was wrong and it was stupid. But yet, it felt like.. I had no control over it. That I couldn't stop it. I tried telling myself that it wasn't my fault but every time I-.."

"Lukas..?"

"Aiden didn't give me a choice. I still care for Jesse, I really do but.. that day, when Aiden embarrassed Jesse like that back at EnderCon when we were kids, Jesse looked at me for help. I really wanted to help but when Aiden looked at me with.. with that threatening stare. I suddenly felt.. weak. That if I try to stop it, it'll only make things worse," Lukas explained, his voice and body trembling as he remembered the terrible memory. "When Jesse ran away, I went after him. I tried to tell him about the misunderstanding and that I really wanted to help him. But.. he didn't listen. Things weren't the same after that."

Jess was stunned, processing the information as best she could as she tried to put two-in-two together. "..is that why you never stood up to Aiden?" She inquired. "Because you're afraid standing up to him will make things worse?"

"No. And it wasn't just me. Even when he would push us aside, treat us like we were dirt, we still wanted his approval. No matter how violent he got and how rude he was, we couldn't fight back. Because it's better to be in the group, hating life than to be his next victim," the blonde quavered. "As much as I wanted to win Jesse back, I still wanted Aiden to like me. Maybe I'm the crazy one. I dunno.."

Jess was left stunned, a wave of sympathy washing over her. This whole time, Lukas wasn't the bad guy after all. He was manipulated by Aiden to stop being friends with Jesse and that manipulation has caused so much pain and fear in him to the point where it has broken a promising friendship.

Rage quickly washed over her at the thought of all the terrible things Aiden has done to Lukas. And not just him, Maya and Gill were victims too. She couldn't let it go on much longer. She had to do something.

"Well, I'm no expert on friendship problems but Lukas, don't blame yourself for someone else's actions. All Aiden has to give is toxic masculinity, manipulation, and hate. You're not like that, Lukas," she consoled. "I.. actually think you're pretty brave. You were able to face the torment that Aiden is putting through."

"But is that enough to excuse everything I did..?" The blonde frowned.

"Well, no. But the best thing you can do is break away from what's holding you back and be you. Aiden can't control your life; no one can. You and you alone can control what goes on in your life. Someone once told me.. if you knew better, you would do better. It's not your fault, Lukas. You were manipulated and controlled by someone taking advantage of your kindness to spread hate," she continued before holding his hand and squeezing it as her eyes sparkled in comfort and determination. "Once all this is over, I promise. I promise I'll help you make it up to my brother."

Lukas' eyes began to water as he gazed down at her. "B-But.. what if.. it's t-too late..?" He croaked.

Jess gave him a small, yet tight embrace. "Even if that's the case, Jesse deserves to know. He needs to know, Lukas. Or else things won't get better," she comforted him. "I'll be here with you. No matter what happens."

Lukas slowly returned the embrace, trying to hold himself back from tearing up as his hands trembled slightly. "T-Thank you.." he murmured. That was all he could muster. Jess comforted him as best she could, rubbing his back to ease the tension and assuring him that everything was okay. Once they finally parted, Lukas wiped some tears from his eyes before sheepishly scratching the back of his neck. "I-.. uhh.. I think I got a speck of dust in my eyes.."

Jess giggled, finding this reaction to be adorable. Lukas then frowned, remembering another issue. "Jess, I'm not sure we're going to make it.." he admitted. "If one of our best fighters is sick - Do we even stand a chance anymore? Not that we haven't dealt with some grade-A problems before.. I just can't help feeling kinda.. hopeless."

"If we stick together, we can do anything. Even something that feels impossible," Jess assured him.

"It just feels EXTRA impossible now."

Jess stood, holding out her hand to help him up as she gave him a warm smile. "Then we stick together extra hard."

Lukas let her words sink in for a moment before nodding. "Okay," he said. He couldn't help but feel better than he had been just a couple of minutes ago. He then glanced at Petra nearby and couldn't help but feel worried. "I just kinda wish Petra would tell everybody. It could make things - easier."

"She said she'll tell everyone eventually," Jess informed him. "I don't know if she's going to keep her word for it though.."

"If she gets worse, I'm going to tell the others," Lukas decided, crossing his arms. "I don't know how long Petra is keeping this secret, but everyone deserves to know."

Jess opened her mouth to reply but froze when she noticed a lever sitting on the tree behind him. Her eyes widened slightly, realizing this might be the last lever she was looking for. "I, uh, kinda need to get to that lever you're blocking," she said.

The blonde at first looked confused but when he glanced behind him, he stepped out of the way so Jess could pull it. As soon as she did, she grinned. "Thanks," she teased, nudging his arm as she walked past him.

"Yep," he instantly replied, being caught by surprise by this. He stared at her as she left, a wide smile sitting on his face as he left his heart fluttering. Jess trotted back to the button Axel and Olivia spoke of before and pushed it. Almost immediately, the door revealed itself. It was dark on the other side, but she could see some lighting inside.

"That's.. weird.." she murmured, not expecting to see what she saw. She then shrugged and began to call her siblings and friends. "Hey, everyone! I think I found Soren's way out!"

The rest of the team joined her, gazing inside the entrance cautiously. Jess' siblings looked relieved, glad that she was able to find the entrance to where Soren must be hiding. Before they could congratulate her, Lukas spoke.

"Way to go, Jess. That's awesome," he grinned, Jesse giving him an annoyed glance before the team stepped inside. Before the siblings could follow, Petra tapped Jesse's shoulder, gaining his attention.

"Nice sleuthing, Jesse. Sorry, I wasn't more help back there," she apologized. "When I think back to how I ran all over EnderCon looking for Ivor.. or when I got that skull."

"I'm just happy you're with us," Jesse assured her, his sisters watching although they didn't say a word.

"Thanks, Jesse," the redhead smiled weakly before trotting inside. The siblings followed after her as well, all three sharing worried glances.

"We'll check out the rest of the house. See if we can find Soren - before he finds us," Chris said, glancing around their new surroundings. "I barely met him, but considering what my cousin has told me, Soren HATES intruders."

"Can't blame him. Imagine living life and you see someone all up in your property," Maggie shrugged before cringing. "I just hope we don't find Soren getting ready for bed. I'm relieved to still have my eyes because I used to overhear Magnus complaining about how he wears the most - revealing bathrobes."

Jess scanned the building, noticing how lavish it looked. Despite the many glowstone and torches lighting the way, it was still quite dark and uninviting with large water fountains placed inside the hallway. The floors were dark oak planks and the walls were sandstone blocks. Jess gazed at one of the water fountains, watching the water flow freely.

"Guess the water system isn't just for the outside," she commented. "Not that the outside was.. actually.. the outside."

She then went along but froze when she spotted a large empty dinner table, enough to fill a large party of people. "Nikki look!" She said, alerting her sister's attention. "You could fit hundreds of people in here."

"But it doesn't look like it's being used for much of anything," Nikki observed. Without another word, the sisters ventured on to join their friends. The party of nine gathered up at one of the fountains, waiting for directions on what to do next.

"Okay, guys. Let's split up. We'll cover more ground that way," Jesse said. "We'll go in pairs and meet up by this fountain in about an hour. If you see anything, shout. We don't have time for fooling around."

The team agreed and thus began to split off into pairs. Maggie went with Nikki, Jesse went with Axel, Lukas went with Petra, and Chris was left with Jess and Olivia. Since it was an odd number

of them, Chris had no choice but to just follow along with the two. Each pair went in their separate direction to search for Soren, leaving the trio alone.

When Jess noticed Reuben trembling, she rubbed his back to ease his fear. "It's okay, boy.." she cooed but froze when she began to hear a song playing. The trio shared the same expression before Chris followed the music, the ladies following after him. Once they pinpointed where the music was coming from, they leaned their heads against the door to listen in.

"Well, the music's getting louder," Chris observed.

"But I don't hear anyone talking in there," Jess frowned. The trio shared tense glances before Jess pressed her hand against the door knob. "Let's see what's going on behind this door.."

Olivia and Chris nodded in agreement before Jess slowly pushed the door open. She didn't know what to expect, but she hoped it was a clue to finding Soren. Once she saw what was inside, her eyes widened in shock and disbelief when she saw what was awaiting them on the other side..



◦●●◉❀ About the Author ❀◉●●◦

Hello, I'm Isabella, Izzy for short! Just your average teen making fanfics about her favorite shows and stuff LOL. I'm in a shit ton of fandoms and I'm interested in starting new fanfics outside of MCSM.

This includes:

MCSM ✂️ (I will stay in the fandom until I die)

Avatar, the Last Airbender/Legend of Korra 🌊🪨🔥💧

Heathers (mostly the movie) ❤️💚💛💙

The Owl House 🦉

Amphibia 🐸

MLP 🦄

Voltron 🪐

Precure ✨

The Babysitters Club (graphic novels only) 🧑

Winx Club 🧚♀️

Sofia the First (kinda) 👑

Ever After High 🧚

Monster High 🧛

Royale High 👑

Rainbow Magic 🧚♂️

The Ghost and Molly McGee 👻

I also ship a shit ton of stuff like McSawyer, Jesstra, Jetra, Lukesse, Sashannarcy, Lumity, Raeda, Huntlow, Klance, Rarijack, Flutterdash, Twipie + Sunset. A lot more that I'm too lazy to list lol. I also include OC's.. if that's fine with any of y'all, I love adding OC's 😭😭 I hope y'all enjoy my stories and have a wonderful day:D

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